Angel Power Project aims to make girls' dreams come true

Part of the goal of the Angel Power Project is to transform the bedrooms of the 11 young women at the Anago-Parkhill Therapeutic Care Residence from the cold, institutional look on the left into the modern, safe, comfortable room on the right.

Submitted photos

By Eric Nixon, Hayter-Walden Publications

For most teenage girls, their bedroom is a personal space that reflects their personality and offers a safe and warm sanctuary. But, for the 11 young women who live at the Anago-Parkhill Therapeutic Care Residence, a bedroom may sometimes be associated with violence or abuse.

To reverse that situation, a group of volunteers began a fundraising initiative earlier this year designed to give the girls at Anago a place to call their own. The ambitious effort is called the Angel Power Project and encompasses several smaller initiatives. The ultimate goal is to give these young women who suffer from mental illness, abuse or other issues their own bedrooms just like any other teenage girls.

"It becomes really important to take their bedrooms from that place of fear into a place of safety – and into a place they can grow healthily," explains Anago Executive Director Mandy Bennett.

The first part of the project is set to be unveiled to the girls next week, when organizers hope to deliver a very special package to the teens. The 'Sleep Tight Safe Night' initiative aims to provide the girls with their own linens, comforters and bedding, as well as pyjamas, bathrobes, slippers and even Teddy Bears. The cost of this initiative is about $2,000.

Running concurrently is 'Suitcase Search,' which helps create a respectful and functional way for the girls to carry their precious belongings. Bennett says many of the girls come to Anago with their possessions in a garbage bag – and leave the same way.

By purchasing suitcases, the second $500 fundraising initiative allows the girls to leave with their possessions in their own suitcases, including the new ones from the Sleep Tight Safe Night program.

Bennett says, "Hopefully, that also represents the difference in them from when they came into the program to when they're leaving – the self respect they feel for themselves, the self-empowerment they now feel."

Donations are still being accepted for both these initiatives. Even if you're not able to give before Christmas, the need will be ongoing as new girls arrive at Anago and others leave to resume their lives.

The Angel Power Project has three other parts, which are being rolled out during the first few months of 2015. The culmination will be a spectacular Extreme Room Makeover that will occur from May 1-3 at the residence.

The 11 girls' rooms are all in desperate needs of new beds, nightstands, flooring, window treatments and paint. During those three days, the idea will be to make all the young women's dreams come true by creating all-new rooms where they can feel safe and comfortable, possibly for the first time in their lives.

The entire Angel Power Project is being coordinated by 'Lead Angel' Cynthia O'Neill, who volunteered to take on the initiative after learning about the Parkhill Residence two years ago.

Mandy Bennett says projects like this are crucial in helping rebuild the lives of these young women. She adds that there is no government funding for renovating rooms or the other parts of the project, so the support of the community is key in making them happen.

Giving the girls a more inviting place to live is one piece in the whole process. "When you have mental health issues, there's a feeling that it's only happening to you, that no one else knows how you feel," explains Bennett. Many of the girls feel isolated and believe that no one cares. In turn, this leaves them hopeless, embarrassed and shamed.

However, having people go out of their way to create a project like this or donate to support it sends an important message. "When the girls hear that people in the community care about them enough to do this for them, that starts to dismantle the isolation," says Bennett. And when you do that, the girls may finally start letting people inside their lives.

Bennett comments that it's like the community is saying to the girls, "We care because you're valuable. We believe you have a great future. We just want to help you."

Cynthia O'Neill and the members of the Angel Power Project have shown how much they believe in the girls at Anago – and they're asking the rest of the community in Parkhill and throughout Middlesex County to offer support in whatever way they can.

For more information, O'Neill can be reached 519-854-1646, via email at cynthia@highaltitudethinking.ca or online at www.anagopowerproject.com.

Ultimately, Bennett says, we have to remember these girls are valuable members of our society. The goal is to give them a future where they can lead inspired lives – and the Angel Power Project is just one more important part of making that happen.

Girl Guides hold Career Event

The Parkhill Girl Guides learned about careers from local professionals last Monday. Marilyn Bezzina, Rachel McKittrick, Nicole Thachuk, Caroline Bruce, and Valerie Basso talked about their careers and offered advice to the Guides about how to reach their goals.

Photo by Clark Teeple, Hayter-Walden Publications

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The Parkhill Girl Guides were visited by some of Parkhill's career women last Monday as part of the Career Awareness Badge. Marilyn Bezzina from the Parkhill Library, Rachel McKittrick, a mechanic, Nicole Thachuk, a DSW, Caroline Bruce, an interior designer who also owns Tweak Jewelry, and Valerie Basso, an orthodontic dental assistant, came to Parkhill United Church to talk to the Girl Guides about planning and achieving their dream careers.

The Girl Guides have been working on their Career Awareness Badges by dissecting Help Wanted ads to determine what sort of qualifications were needed for the job, preparing job interview skits, and coming up with a plan of action to achieve their ideal careers.

The careers chosen by the Girl Guides range from bakers and artists to teachers and accountants. One even wants to be a reporter. Her plan of action includes taking courses in writing and photography. While these are important for her excellent career choice (I write without any bias at all), the women who spoke at the career event emphasized something that should be on every plan of action. "A major common thread between all careers was the need for sciences and math in high school," says Tania Taylor, the Parkhill Girl Guide leader.

The Girl Guides will be padding their resumes with volunteer work by helping the Ailsa Craig Food Bank put together hampers this Christmas season and cleaning up the NMDHS fields on Earth Day in the spring.

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